

MY NEGRO WOMAN NANNE
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Nicholas Bowes, Bedford's first minister, served from 1730 to 1754, when there was a rift in theological matters between him and the church, and his ministry ended.

To the Church of Christ in Bedford

Brethren

Under the present situation of affairs in this town I apprehend that my usefulness as a minister is at an end among you. Therefore I desire that you would give me a dismissal and that the relation between me and you as a pastor and a people shall entirely cease.

*Nicholas Bowes
August, 1754*

He joined the army as chaplain Fall, 1755 and was sent to Fort Edwards in NY. On the march back had a fatal stroke in Warren MA and was buried there.

His will, made October 4, 1755, said:

I give and bequeath unto my Lucy my Wife and to her Heirs forever my Negro Woman Nanne....

Middlesex Probate Case #2316 page 13

Lucy remarried in 1762.

She died in 1768. There is no mention of Nanne in Lucy's will.

Did Nanne die?

Did she stay enslaved for her lifetime?

Was she freed?

Was she sold?

I can find no further word of her.

It is incredible to believe that there was a woman living in Bedford enslaved. But more incredibly, she was not alone in her servitude. As an estimate:

Abraham, Abraham's son Jack, Abraham's grandson Cyrus, Ishmael ... Cuff... Domire ... Quimbo ... I have found a half dozen more slaves, most buried in unmarked graves in the African Reservation, the area in the northeast corner of the Old Burying Ground reserved for African Americans.

Slavery was quite legal in Massachusetts colony. Massachusetts was the first colony to legalize slavery in the "Body of Liberties" of 1641:

There shall never be any bond slavery, villinage or captivity amongst us unless it be lawful Captives taken in just wars, and such strangers as willingly sell themselves or are sold to us.

This was amended in 1670 ---- to say that children born of a mother who is enslaved will also be slaves.

The first documented slave ship to arrive in Massachusetts Bay Colony was the ship "Desire" which arrived in 1638. It was also the first slave ship to carry slaves – Pequot Indians – out of Massachusetts, in 1638.

The 1780 Massachusetts Constitution does not mention slavery as such, but the rights laid out in the document were used to set the precedent which ended slavery in the state. (Quock Walker, Elizabeth Freeman.)

The Bedford Tax Valuation of 1771 listed seven "servants for life."

The Bedford census of 1790 counted no African American slaves.